

Parking Options for Downtown Kirkland

A Report of the Parking Advisory Board

January 2012

Introduction

The parking problem in downtown Kirkland has been characterized by most observers as a shortage of parking supply. But the Parking Advisory Board (PAB) has learned the importance of better managing existing parking supply is necessary before adding new supply. This report addresses our proposal to extend the hours for pay parking in City operated parking lots downtown.

Background

The Downtown Kirkland Parking Study and Plan of October 2003 called for effective management of parking to support and facilitate a long-term strategic vision for downtown. It called for a market-based approach to management of parking. The Study provides a guide to maximizing the City's existing parking resources in conjunction with adding new parking supply that is coordinated with new development.

The report also recommended formation of the Parking Advisory Board to help implement the parking component of the downtown strategic plan. Since its creation the PAB has been working improved management of parking and has explored various ways of adding new supply. In the 2005-2006 period the PAB focus was to earmark new parking revenue for new supply. Next, the PAB examined the cost of building a parking structure with ground floor commercial, but the lack of a suitable site for a free standing garage stymied that effort. The desire for parking that is more integrated with development led the PAB to investigate with stakeholders the notion of the development of a contingency financing plan so that the City could be ready to partner with a developer. This approach floundered due to the lack of support of property owners for an assessment of benefited properties. However, this resistance may be lessened if a specific development is proposed. However, this investigation did result in the realization that financing of new parking supply will require funding from three sources: parking revenue from users, assessment of benefited properties within walking distance, and city general funds that reflect broader benefits of access to public facilities in the downtown.

The PAB favors partnering with a developer, but has not been able to prepare a readiness plan to do so. Downtown stakeholders were reluctant to develop a downtown improvement plan that involved a financial commitment in the flexible form of a Transportation Improvement District that could fund parking and other downtown improvements from a mix of general revenue, parking revenue, and assessment of benefited properties. Consequently, the public is not immediately ready to participate if and when a developer steps up.

Meanwhile, the PAB has been able to add new parking supply in the form of a leasing a surface lot at the Antique Mall site. However, this is not a permanent solution to the deficiency of parking supply. If this parcel is privately developed this new public supply may be lost.

Recently, the PAB has focused on managing the current supply of parking by means of pricing, as time limit regulation, and regulation of where employees park has proved difficult to enforce and not very effective. Currently, we price parking in the Marina Park, and Lake and Central lots from 5-9 PM and in the Park and Main lot from 9 to 9. On warm summer days all lot are full. On rainy winter days there is plenty of parking available. This suggests variable pricing, but we do not have a well developed parking marketplace that would warrant varying parking price by demand.

A rule of thumb used in parking is that parking ought to be priced at a level to create 85% utilization, leaving 15% available for arriving customers. Since Kirkland does not charge market rates for parking, we have hours that exceed 85% utilization. But we also have many hours of less than 85% utilization for which any price is too high. So we are not ready for variable pricing, but we are ready for a nominal price to better manage our parking.

Parking for Public Uses. There are many public properties that contribute to the parking deficiency. These properties include Heritage Hall, the Marina Park, Lee Johnson field, the recent expansion of the Library, the swimming pool, Kirkland Performance Center, the Community Center and the Teen Center. If a parking ratio of spaces per floor area, per seat of performance or stadia, per acre of park use were applied the public spaces, we could estimate the number of spaces of parking that would be required. This would yield a number that would exceed half of the capacity of the Library garage and half of the Marina Park lot, which mitigates some of this public parking demand. The difference is a parking deficiency due to public uses. This implies a public responsibility for part of the downtown parking supply deficiency.

Parking Supply as Impacted by “Grandfathering”. There is a deficiency in private parking supply in downtown Kirkland. While downtown Kirkland is pedestrian friendly, businesses decry the lack of convenient parking for their customers. Most of downtown Kirkland developed prior to the advent of strip malls wherein parking for patrons is provided on site. Most downtown land parcels are small and completely occupied by one or two story buildings. This legacy of small buildings on small parcels makes redevelopment difficult. Even if redevelopment were to occur, it is unlikely that the private parking deficiency would be reduced.

Redevelopment of legacy buildings is unlikely to reduce this deficiency in private parking supply because existing floor area is grandfathered from having to provide parking. Even if redeveloped, the amount of current floor area is exempt from parking requirements. Developers would have to replace current off-street parking spaces and provide parking for additional floor area, but not for the redevelopment of current space. New parking spaces that would occur in the redevelopment process will serve new floor area, not current floor area. So, it is unlikely that the current deficiency in private parking supply will be reduced by redevelopment.

Shared Parking. The PAB recommends that remaining opportunity sites (U. S. Bank, Antique Mall, Eagles, and Kirkland Square) not be redeveloped as residential over commercial, but as office over commercial, so that shared parking can be achieved. This should not be viewed as a mandate; instead incentives may be needed to encourage developers to build office over retail. Incentives may take the form of public participation in shared parking, density bonuses, impact fee reductions, etc.

Existing Situation

The Background section indicates adding parking supply is not likely in the near term to solve downtown's parking problem. Consequently, the options we present deal with better management of the current supply of parking. Nevertheless, there are some longer range issues that we will continue to monitor.

With the addition of 84 spaces at Park & Main (leased at the Antique Mall site), the PAB is confident that supply is sufficient to manage the current demand, characterized by the current depressed economy. However, this is not a permanent solution. The economy will improve and new development will occur, and the Park & Main site will be redeveloped. Consequently, we will continue to investigate new parking supply options.

Additional analysis of parking occupancy using parking revenue data will sharpen our knowledge as to extent of the parking deficiency in terms of the number of hours and days per year. This will provide guidance as to assessing parking supply and demand.

Further analysis of parking demand and supply may be needed, particularly with respect to various build-out scenarios for downtown. This will need to be coordinated with the timing of build out of the Kirkland ParkPlace redevelopment.

The PAB will continue to examine the public and private cost responsibility for financing new parking supply. This is complicated by options for locating the supply and the extent to which it is free standing or integrated with a development project.

The PAB has concluded that a "build it (parking) and they will come" approach is not a viable economic development strategy for downtown Kirkland. Rather, public participation in an integrated development project is more appropriate.

Near-Term Options

Option A: Continue Current Prices, with selective enforcement of employee parking prohibition.

Currently, we charge for parking in public lots in the evening only. Option A will continue that, but we will add No Employee Parking signs in the Marina Park lot and in the Lake and Central lot. Elimination of ParkSmart is seen by some downtown employees as permission to park downtown. We are seeing a large number of vehicles that are moving-to-evade the 3- hour time limit in these lots. The new license plate recorder provides evidence. But what should we do with that evidence?

We propose to utilize the existing ordinance that prohibits employees from parking downtown. However, this assumes all move-to-evade vehicles belong to employees. Those who are not employees will complain if ticketed as employees. One way of reducing wrongfully ticketed vehicles would be to use the move-to-evade data to identify chronic abusers and talk to them personally before ticketing. This more labor intensive approach may be more effective though in dealing with the employees who are frequently moving to evade. The Police Department favors this approach, along with NO EMPLOYEE PARKING ALLOWED signs in both lots. However, we will need to monitor this approach as it may move more employees to abuse on-street 2-hour time limits.

Option B: All Free Parking, with stepped-up enforcement and additional public parking. Eliminate all pay parking and increase enforcement of time limits, enact a move-to-evade ordinance to discourage moving of vehicles, and buy the Antique Mall site and build a public parking structure with ground floor commercial for both employees and customers. This would require a large capital outlay of \$10-20M by the City and benefitted property owners. However, neither party appears willing to invest at that level. But our survey tells us people want free parking and more of it.

Option C: Pay Parking in both day and evening in city lots, with move-to-evade ordinance for on-street parking. Extend pay parking from 11 AM to 9 PM in Marina Park lot and in Lake and Central lot. This will require a move-to-evade ordinance to address the problem of employees parking on street. It will also require a program to make pay parking more user friendly, such as first hour discount, dollar coins and/or bill acceptors, and merchant dissemination of reduced price tokens for customers.

Option D: Pay Parking in both day and evening in all public off-street and on-street spaces. Extend pay parking throughout the downtown in public lots, library garage, and on street. Eliminate time limits and employee prohibitions. Customers, visitors and employees will be more likely to find space, and avoidance behaviors will be reduced. Again, programs to make the payment system user friendly will have to be developed. This will create spillover in nearby neighborhoods and may necessitate neighborhood parking permit programs.

The PAB recommends the adoption of Option C in the near term, moving to Option D in the long term. This recommendation is based on the following reasons:

- Pricing is preferable to regulatory approaches. Avoidance behaviors find ways to beat regulatory measures.
- Option C will provide evidence as to customer loss due to pricing parking versus customer gain from more available parking. Too many of the existing parkers are not customers.
- The parking requirement for the redevelopment of ParkPlace is based on pricing of parking there. If we do not charge for parking downtown, their workers will spillover to downtown parking spaces and the library garage.
- Surveys of downtown users find little consensus to guide us. People want free parking and more parking, and are frustrated with the time it takes to find available parking.

The following section summarizes the results of recent parking surveys.

Listening to Users

The most recent survey, taken this summer finds there is support for building more parking and for “first hour free”. Respondents do not find the parking signs and rules confusing. Most find parking in less than 6 minutes and within 3 blocks of their destination. See attachment A for more details.

Slicing and dicing these responses in more detail show that 33% of on-street parkers spent more than 6 minutes searching. After 5 PM that jumps to 40%.

An earlier study that used stated preference methods to assess use of a parking garage highlighted the differences of respondents. Two distinct types of parkers were identified. The preferences of older and higher income persons are quite different from younger and lower income persons.

Some principal findings were that charging for on-street parking will cause spillover into neighborhoods and cause some persons to go to destinations other than downtown. However, women and older persons are less sensitive to parking charges and seem more willing to pay for convenience and for parking availability, while younger persons are more sensitive to parking charges and are more willing to walk and avoid parking charges.

Similarly, free parking in a new parking garage is highly desired. Women are less likely to park in a parking garage than are men. The location of a new parking garage is quite important. A long walk distance will detract from its desirability.

The analysis shows why people are more inclined to drive and search for parking than they are to park farther and walk. A 1200-foot walk is equal to a parking cost of \$0.95 while a search time of five minutes is equal to a parking cost of \$0.45. Although walking 1200 feet takes nearly five minutes, it is perceived as twice as costly as a search time of 5 minutes.

Attachment A

Parking Survey Summary